Chinese mitten crab
Eriocheir sinensis

Invasive: High impact

Species profile

Habitat: Freshwater. Adults most likely to be found in freshwater habitat, mating occurs at sea.

Distribution in Ireland: Two casual sightings in the River Suir.

Status: Not established.

Family name: Varunidae.

Reproduction: Return to sea to breed, eggs are laid in brackish water.

Identifying features

Colour: Olive-green brown on top, whitish underneath.

Claws: Mat of dark hair grows on equal sized claws, which are referred to as "mittens". This is a distinctive feature of the Chinese mitten crab.

Size: Carapace (upper section of the exoskeleton) width 3-10cm.

Leg size: Legs are approximately twice the length of the carapace (shell) width.

Chinese mitten crab showing hair around claws
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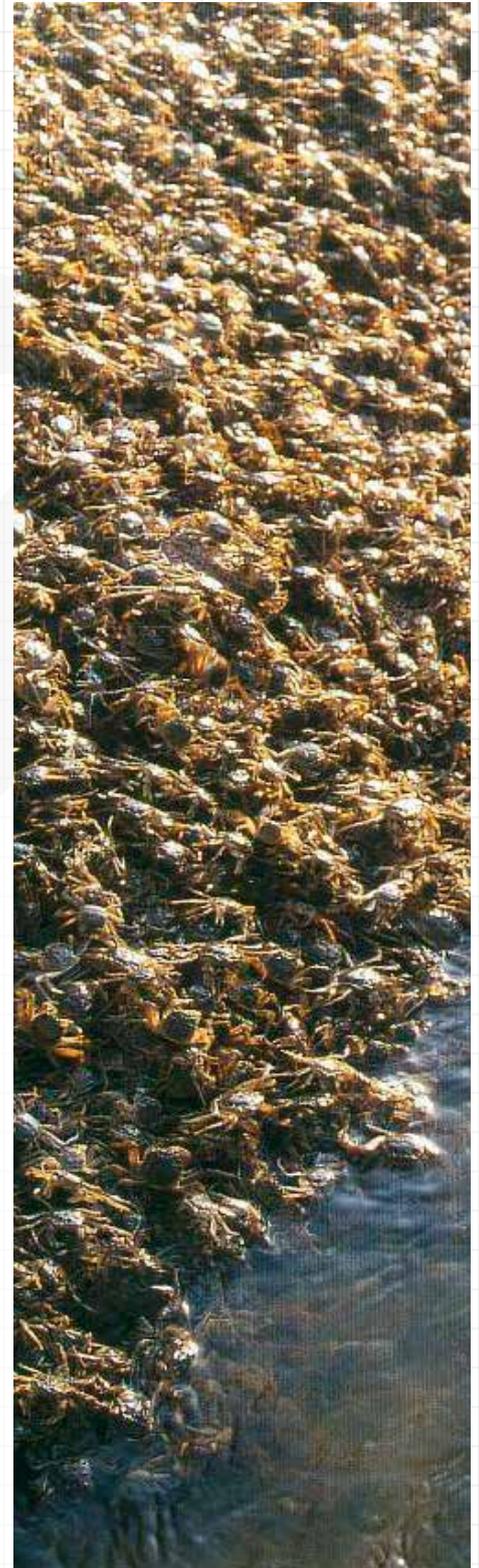
Large number of individuals at the edge of a waterbody
- © S. Gollasch

Chinese mitten crab

Threats

In high densities the species can cause damage to soft sediment banks through burrowing.

Burrowing can cause erosion which may lead to flooding areas becoming more vulnerable.

The species may impact upon native species, such as the endangered and protected white clawed crayfish *(Austropotamobius pallipes)*.

Possible economic impacts, the species has cost German authorities at least 80 million euro.

Hazard for human health as the species is an intermediate host for a mammalian lung fluke which can infect humans if eaten.

Similar species

No other species of freshwater crab has been recorded in Ireland. In coastal and estuarine areas it may be at a glance mistaken for other species of crab however, no other crab has hairy mittens on their claws. Expert verification should be sought for your sighting.

Claws close up
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Chinese mitten crabs burrow into river banks which can leave areas vulnerable to flooding - GBNNSS Crown ©